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ANOTHER VIEW / JOHN HEAD

Unearthing the Whole Truth Of Nov. 22, 1963

I'VE NOT SEEN Oliver Stone's "JFK," so this isn't about the movie. Rather, it's about what I understand to be the idea behind the movie. That idea is that the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was the result of a conspiracy, one that likely reached into the upper ranks of the U.S. government.

This is not a new idea. The echo of gunfire had barely died in Dealey Plaza before the first conspiracy theory was born.

When wondering why it had happened, people tended to think about the qualities they admired most in John Kennedy. Then they thought about the people who hated him for those very same qualities. That gave them the motive.

I remember the very strong speculation in the black community after the assassination. It was very clear, I heard the grownups say. Mr. Kennedy was for civil rights. Whenever a leader in America stands up for black folks, they strike him down. Look at Lincoln.

Who "they" were was never clear. It was stated emphatically that it wasn't simply a "he," as in Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone. When the Warren Commission report came out with that conclusion, I couldn't find many people who bought it.

I did. For me, the strength of the commission's conclusion lay in the weakness of the logic of its detractors. The key to their reasoning, as I recall, was that the U.S. government was so powerful that there was no way its most powerful figure could be killed by a nobody.

All these years later, the conspiracy fever that surrounded the Kennedy assassination has not cooled.

I have not let go of the belief that it is entirely possible Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, but I now have serious doubts that he did. I'm not ready yet, however, to take the plunge into the conspiracy pool. I can't accept their reasoning.

That reasoning formulates theories on the Kennedy assassination based on how we've come to see the world in the years since that day in Dallas. It says that our government and its private-sector allies are so powerful, corrupt, so set on getting their way by any means, that they had to be involved in the assassination.

In a way, we have made a full circle in our logic. We started out justifying conspiracy theories by having too much faith in our government. We now justify them by having too little.

The truth, of course, lies somewhere in between. The available evidence makes a strong case for a conspiracy. I'd like to see everything the Warren Commission had to work with made public. Then, perhaps, we can make judgments on facts and not faith.

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